

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MONTREAL 1699

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SUBJ: EDITOR OF LE DEVOIR ON QUEBEC ELECTION

1. THE HIGHLY RESPECTED EDITOR OF LE DEVOIR, CLAUDE RYAN, TODAY GAVE CONSULS GENERAL HARPER AND MCNAMARA HIS VIEWS ON UPCOMING ELECTION IN QUEBEC. RYAN BELIEVES THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE COOLING OF ANTI-GOVERNMENT ANTAGONISM OVER PAST WEEK WITH GROWING REFLECTION ON DIRE CONSEQUENCES OF PQ VICTORY. AS RESULT, HE BELIEVES LIBERALS ARE LIKELY GAIN ABOUT 70 SEATS IN UPCOMING ELECTION. PQ COULD TAKE AS MANY AS 30 BUT IS MORE LIKELY WIN ABOUT 25. HE BASED THIS ESTIMATE ON ASSUMPTION THAT PQ HAD REASONABLE CHANGE OF SUCCESS IN 24 RIDINGS IN WHICH MARGIN OF LIBERAL VICTORY IN 1973 WAS 4000 VOTES OR LESS. FURTHER, HE ASSUMED PQ WOULD WIN ALL 6 SEATS IT PRESENTLY HOLDS. UNION NATIONALE, HE RECKONS, IS UNLIKELY GAIN MORE THAN 10 SEATS AND NONE OF THESE WILL BE IN HEAVILY NON-FRANCOPHONE MONTREAL CONSTITUENCIES. RYAN BELIEVES BULK OF ANGLOS AND ETHNICS WILL VOTE FOR LIBERALS IN FINAL ANALYSIS.

2. COMMENTING ON BOURASSA'S PERSONAL ELECTION FORTUNES, RYAN SAID THAT ETHNIC CONSTITUENTS, WHO HOLD CRUCIAL BALANCE IN MERCIER RIDING, MAY VENT IRE BY VOTING AGAINST PREMIER. HOWEVER, SHOULD LIBERALS CARRY SOME 70 SEATS, ONE OF PARTY FAITHFUL WILL
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VACATE SAFE SEAT FOR BOURASSA.

3. ON OTHER HAND, IF LIBERALS DO NOT SUCCEED IN GAINING COMFORTABLE MAJORITY (I.E. 10 TO 15 SEATS), BOURASSA'S HOLD ON PREMIERSHIP WOULD BE TENUOUS. REPLACEMENT THEN LIKELY BE PICKED FROM WITHIN PRESENT CABINET. RYAN CAUTIONED THAT ONE SHOULD NOT UNDERESTIMATE PRESENT VICE PREMIER, GERALD LEVESQUE, WHO IS MORE ABLE THAN GENERALLY GIVEN CREDIT FOR, IS REASONABLY YOUNG, AND IS NOT "FANATIC." HE RULED OUT MINISTER OF FINANCE GARNEAU AS "HAVING INSUFFICIENT STAMINA." HOWEVER, HE DOES NOT CONSIDER THE ACCUSATION PUBLISHED BY DEVOIR IMPLICATING GARNEAU IN EFFORTS CORRUPT QUEBEC LIQUOR BOARD PURCHASING PRACTICES AS SERIOUS ENOUGH TO DO GARNEAU LONG TERM POLITICAL DAMAGE. MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY SAINT-PIERRE, RYAN SAID, HAS ALIENATED IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND THEREFORE MIGHT BE EXCLUDED. WHEN CONSUL GENERAL MCNAMARA ASKED IF ANDRE REYNAULD MIGHT BE GOOD CANDIDATE, RYAN SAID REYNAULD IS COLD BUT INTELLIGENT, AMBITIOUS, AND COULD DEVELOP AS POLITICIAN.

4. RYAN BELIEVES BOURASSA MAY DECIDE TO STEP DOWN AS PREMIER IN ABOUT TWO YEAR'S TIME EVEN IF HE IS RETURNED WITHOUT DIFFICULTY IN THIS ELECTION. THE EDITOR OF LE DEVOIR SAID BOURASSA CONFIDED TO HIM HIS WISH TO EVENTUALLY RESIGN AS PREMIER AND NAMED THREE PEOPLE, ALL OUTSIDE PRESENT CABINET, WHOM HE CONSIDERS AS GOOD CANDIDATES TO SUCCEED HIM. RYAN DECLINED TO NAME ANY OF THREE.

5. LARGE PROPORTION OF PARTI QUEBECOIS CANDIDATES ARE UNION ACTIVISTS AND TEACHERS WHO PLAYED PROMINENT PART IN RECENT TEACHER'S STRIKE. RYAN DOUBTS THEY HAVE WIDE VOTER APPEAL AND ASSERTED THAT THESE ARE PEOPLE WHO ADVOCATE EXTRA-LEGAL OVERTHROW OF GOVERNMENT. THEIR PRESENCE AS PARTY CANDIDATES IS SERIOUS ENOUGH REASON TO OPPOSE PQ.

6. COMMENT: WHILE WE DO NOT YET AGREE WITH RYAN'S ASSESSMENT ON PROBABLE DIVISION OF SEATS IN NEXT QUEBEC NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, WE ALSO HAVE OBSERVED MORE SOBER MOOD SETTING IN AMONG QUEBEC ELECTORATE. MANY WHO HAVE BEEN VOCIFEROUS IN CONDEMNATION OF LIBERALS ARE NOW COMING TO SAD CONCLUSION THAT THREAT OF SEPARATISM LEAVES THEM NO SAFE ALTERNATIVE TO VOTING FOR LIBERALS. WHILE SYMPATHIZING WITH UNION NATIONALE MANY WILL NOT VOTE UN FOR FEAR OF DIVIDING FEDERALIST VOTE. HOWEVER, IN ANGLOPHONE RIDINGS IN WEST

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MONTREAL, WHERE PQ IS NO THREAT, WE STILL BELIEVE UN COULD BENEFIT FROM SUBSTANTIAL ANTI-LIBERAL VOTE. ABOVE CONVERSATION TOOK PLACE BEFORE MR. RYAN HAD SEEN RESULTS OF LATEST PUBLIC OPION POLL WHICH STRONGLY FAVORS PQ.

HARPER

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